

**SIGAR**Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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LL-01-d5 Interview with Ambassador Douglas Lute, NATO Permanent Rep, former Director Iraq/Afghanistan, NSC 2007-2014				
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Lessons Learned Programs

An effective lessons learned program would be organic. If done from the outside it would generate antibodies, but nonetheless it's still a worthwhile effort.

NSC Organizational Processes

I did not have a lot of direct interaction with the NSC. My perspective from 2004-2007 is through CENTCOM and then the J3. The J3 typically does not attend NSC meetings. CENTCOM is invited on a



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case-by-case basis. I would say until 2007, I had no direct interaction with the NSC. I had seen the "Convener" role of NSC from my seat on the Joint staff prior, but before my prominent role as "Director" I didn't have a view onto NSC processes. NSC took direction from DOD within Joint Staff.

From 2004-2007, during the Rumsfeld years, there was a tight leash on DOD. This coincides with my "outside" years. There was no huge role for the NSC at that point except for the PCs.

In 2006, big moves were made. There were the elections, Rumsfeld transitioned to Gates, and Petraeus took command in Iraq. In 2007, Hadley convinces the President that the NSC needs a bigger role. He needed a deputy to focus on Iraq and Afghanistan, whose attention would break down to about 85 percent on Iraq and 15 percent on Afghanistan, or maybe even 90 percent attention on Iraq and 10 percent attention on Afghanistan. This reflects the weight of effort regarding troop numbers. In 2007, Afghanistan was viewed as an "economy of force" – in other words, a secondary effort.

The scheme was to hire someone who knew the two conflicts and could relieve Hadley of the daily duties of advising the NSC. There was not much of a sense of strategy in the military sense – ways, means, and ends – but obviously there was a sense of policy; that's what the NSC does. However, there was not attention given to goals, methods, and resources, which is essentially what strategy is. The only professional group that does real strategy is the military. From that perspective, it's not hard to see where to contribute. Why should we have the expectation that outside the military the leadership knows how to do strategy? Hadley is a corporate lawyer; he is not schooled in policy. Susan Rice, Donilon – they are not schooled in this. Maybe they have some experience in policy, but definitely not strategy. Therefore, there is a heavy burden on the military for strategy development. It was not a rational process that determined the NSC needed a strategist; it felt like it happened randomly on a Tuesday. But there was a structural gap: there were two wars going on and we didn't have anyone speaking strategically. There was a gap, or a void, in trying to connect ends, ways, and means.

Resource Reviews and Strategy

The resource reviews come from a Clausewitzian strategic logic of ends, ways, and means. Strategy is the initial alignment of what you want to achieve – goals, or ends. The NSC is good at this part of policy; there is a healthy paragraph outlining goals in Afghanistan. The ends part is outlined by presidential directives, rhetoric, speeches. But below this, the trilogy or chain tends to get weaker.

As for ways, there is only a casual appreciation of how to deal with this part of the equation. There is an overemphasis on the military – an over-appreciation of the military and an under-appreciation of policy, diplomacy and development. These are all considered secondary to the primacy of military ways. This begins to fracture or erode strategy. We came to this realization late (i.e. Obama speech on hammer/nail).

Given *what* you're trying to achieve and *how* is where resources and resource reviews come in, but no one is tallying up the bill. If you over-rely on the military, there tends to be a fixation on troop numbers. It's as if the only dial in the engine room is troop numbers. Resource reviews discovered what other resources are in hand, and sometimes there are glaring findings. AID, for instance, was under-executing by more than half of its appropriations. There was a huge bubble in the pipeline and they couldn't catch up. The thought is that if we don't spend, GAO or committees on the Hill will stop us from getting more funding. This leads to spend, spend, spend. The reason this is happening: no one is paying attention in an interagency sense to resources.



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The military, for instance, has over \$1 billion in CERP money but does not at all coordinate with AID and no one can account for it – it was funny money! Classic case: you go to a PRT and they are almost completely reliant on CERP. There would be a State guy at the PRT totally out of his element saying, “No one pays any attention to me.” There was a distorted view of development because of this overreliance on the military. Development objectives take on short-term time horizons to fit the military’s short time horizons when development really needs long-term horizons.

Khost--Gardez road: There was criminal infiltration and the Taliban were making money on the fact that the road was never going to be completed. PRT commanders were flooding money into it, one-year money, to no result. Resource reviews showed us that if you only focused on the ends and ways, then there is no strategy; you are missing the means, or the resources. But they don’t get down to strategy (where the money meets the road) because you don’t have a strategy. The military gets this: tactical level – don’t try to achieve something without the resources for it. Look at the bios for NSA advisors, except for Powell. You shouldn’t expect them to come as strategic advisors because they don’t have that sort of background. This shouldn’t be a surprise.

I bumped into an even more fundamental lack of knowledge; we were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan – we didn’t know what we were doing. What are the demographics of the country? The economic drivers? AID: really? We’re going to do something in Afghanistan with \$10 billion? Haiti is a small country in our own backyard with no extremist insurgency and we can’t develop it. And we expect to develop Afghanistan with \$10 billion? Where we have the Pashtuns – a nation with no nation state with 60 percent living in Pakistan. What are we trying to do here? We didn’t have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking. We never would have tolerated rosy-goal statements if we understood, and this didn’t really start happening until Obama. For example, the economy: we stated that our goal is to establish a “flourishing market economy.” I thought we should have specified a flourishing drug trade – this is the only part of the market that’s working. It’s really much worse than you think. There is a fundamental gap of understanding on the front end, overstated objectives, an overreliance on the military, and a lack of understanding of the resources necessary.

DOD’s budget is roughly \$120 billion per year, which should include about \$1 million per year per soldier. That means approximately \$100 billion per year on soldiers alone. Did we really need the Burger Kings, gyms, bottled water shipped over the Arabian Sea? DOD’s budget to build ANSF in 2010-2011 or 2011-2012 was the single largest item in the budget. It even exceeded the Joint Strike Fighter budget for two years. They were spending over \$10 billion each year that was appropriated at \$12 billion, and they realized they couldn’t spend it all and had to give back \$1 billion. We can’t just shovel one-year money at this problem. You can’t possibly build the ANSF that fast.

We were also pouring money into huge infrastructure projects to obligate money that was appropriated to show we could spend it. And we were building infrastructure in ways that Afghanistan could never sustain or even use in some cases.

One poignant example of this is a ribbon cutting ceremony complete with the giant scissors I attended for the district police chief in some God-forsaken province. It was a USACE-completed building with a glass façade and an atrium. The police chief couldn’t even open the door; he had never seen a doorknob like this. To me, this encapsulates the whole experience in Afghanistan.



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In terms of appropriations, Congress appropriated what the administration asked for. This had the distorting effect of having to support the troops. If you don't understand how ends, ways and means fit together (or maybe they don't even make sense in the first place), the simplest thing to do is to support the troops or support the Afghan troops so we can leave. I didn't see a lot of staff probing deeper. I mean, look who mans the staff committees: not strategists, but budgeters. We don't have a cross-government structure that is really focused on strategy.

Once in a while, ok, we can overspend. We are a rich country and can pour money down a hole and it doesn't bust the bank. But should we? Can't we get a bit more rational about this? Here's why not: because of the bureaucratic burdens between the different players. State, AID, and DOD are the big three and the sorts of organizational changes necessary to mandate that they are more rational on strategic questions of war won't be done from the bottom up – a lessons learned project won't break down barriers because these bureaucratic barriers are too strong.

DOD's own barriers were only broken down by Vietnam through Goldwater-Nichols. You need law to mandate reform, which in this case broke down the bureaucratic, stovepipe approach used in Vietnam. And this dealt only with the internal issues of one of the biggest players. We need a solution *across* the biggest players. With something like a "Goldwater-Nichols II" the problem would entail Congress reforming itself, particularly the Committee structures in Congress. If the American people knew the magnitude of this dysfunction...2,400 lives lost. Who will say this was in vain?

Keep in mind now that it's high political season here. The notion of being harshly introspective will be next to politically impossible. Maybe with a little more time and perspective it will not be as politicized. The military is the most culturally introspective organization. Still, they tend to do this at the lowest level, the tactical level, but don't do this as we move up the chain. Bolger's report was two-thirds about how the troops did tactically.

The 2014 withdrawal date was first announced in Karzai's inaugural speech in 2009. Spanta gave the speech to Karzai after Eikenberry added the statement that by the end of my [Karzai's] term, we [Afghans] should be fully responsible for our country (through ANSF), which translates to 2014.

At the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010, a huge topic is Afghanistan, which is NATO's largest military operation. NATO takes note of Karzai's inauguration statement and write his statement into NATO's communiqué: Karzai couldn't refute it because he had in more or less words made the statement and this gave the coalition a horizon to aim for. To move a big coalition, you need two things: resources and a calendar. Obama has been setting strategic markers and end points on the calendar for achieving ends. This gave us a window to end or wrap up building ANSF. This was an opportunity to plant the flag, creating a closer horizon. Why not? Karzai had already said it. This focused DOD on the task at hand – building ANSF. There was an overemphasis on doing the military effort ourselves; we were predominantly doing it ourselves and discounting Afghan capacity and means. There was an under resourced advisory effort (for the ANSF) for years. So this planted the flag and forced DOD to build the ANSF as a priority. I'd say it worked, mostly.

The NATO Lisbon communiqué stated that beyond 2014, NATO accepts and Afghanistan welcomes continuing efforts at 1/10 the current size, which is now Resolute Support. In Chicago, we arrived at another benchmark – a date to transition to a non-combat mission.

The problem is that in the meantime, we had surged. A fundamental impact of the surge was to westernize the fight – we committed to do it ourselves, not through Afghans. So who was doing the advisory effort? We economized. We got the ANSF we deserve. If we started with ANSF in 2002-



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2006 when the Taliban was weak and disorganized, things may have been different. Instead, we went to Iraq. If we committed money deliberately and sooner, we could have a different outcome.